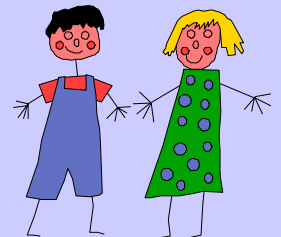
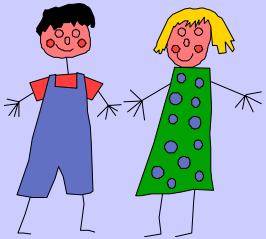


Placement Stability in Out of Home Care

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Tracy L. Cornett

Cynthia Wilson Trent



Introduction



This research study explored how the frequency of social worker visits to children in out of home care (OOHC) and their foster parents effected placement stability. A chart review of the case files (secondary data) for 80 children in OOHC in the Kentucky River Service Region (rural southeastern Kentucky) was performed for the quantitative section. Additionally, face-to-face structured interviews with 10 foster parents and 10 social workers were conducted to assess the quality of the visits and how these visits impacted placement stability for the qualitative section. Information obtained from this study will be used as additional data to aid in meeting the outcomes set forth by the Child and Family Service Review (CFSR) conducted by the Federal Department of Health and Human Services.



Placement Stability in OOHC

Questions from the chart review gathered data for the quantitative section of this research contained the following information:

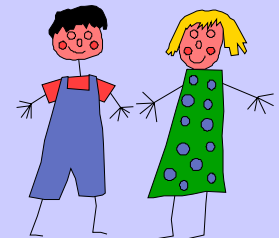
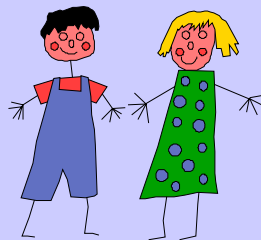
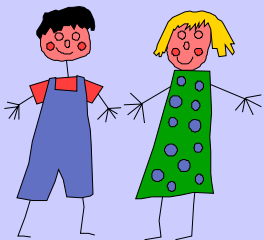
***Gender of the child**

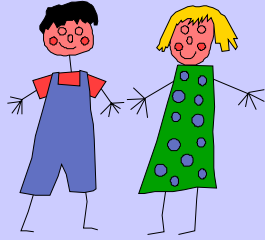
***Child's Date of Birth (Recoded Variable to Age of Child)**

***Lengths of time in OOHC in months**

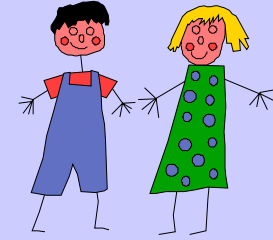
***Number of social worker visits with the child during the period under review**

***Number of placement moves since the initial entry into OOHC**





Design

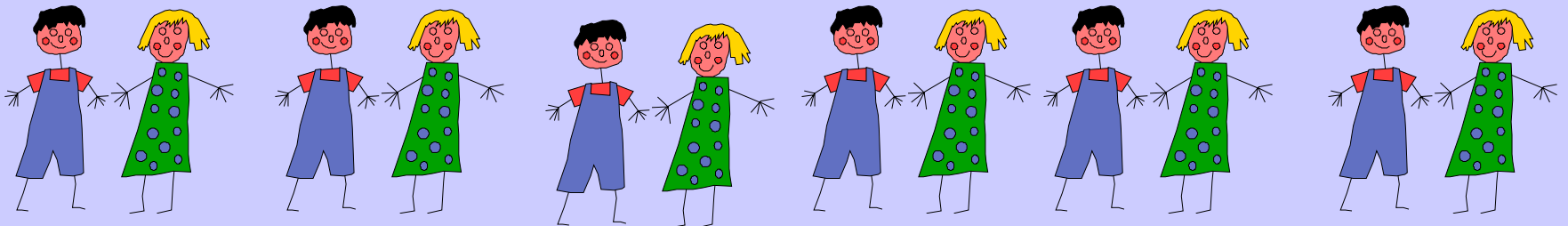


For the quantitative study an explanatory research strategy through a summative program evaluation was utilized. A pre-experimental design using the one-shot case study method (XO) with one group was applicable. A chart review form was developed and utilized, which consisted of information taken from The Workers Information SysTem (TWIST) database and TWO-058 (Children in Placement Report). Information gathered consisted of secondary data in regard to basic demographics, placement history, and frequency of visits. The sampling frame of 80 subjects was selected by performing a random sample of the 290 children in OOHC in the Kentucky River Service Region of the Cabinet for Health and Family Services as of 10-31-04.

Sample

A Comparison of State and Region

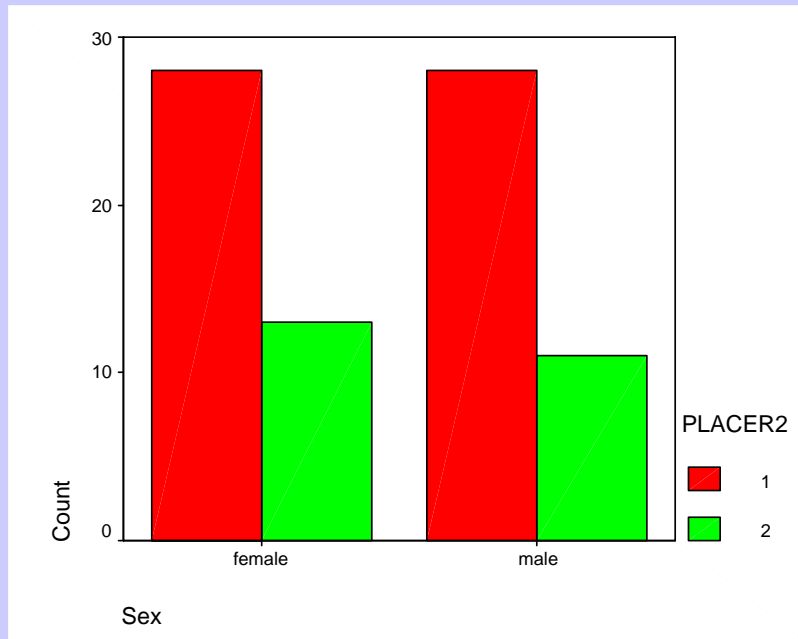
	<u>Kentucky</u>	<u>Ky. River Region</u>	<u>Sample</u>
Mean age	10.6 years Sd=5.86	7.6 years Sd=5.84	8.7 years Sd=6.35
Mean Length of time in OOHC	25.2 months Sd=24.60	25.3 months Sd=27.65	18.5 months Sd=23.46
Mean changes in placement	3.1 moves Sd=3.37	3.2 moves Sd=2.68	2.1 moves Sd=2.75



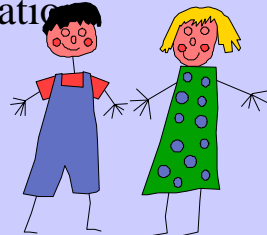


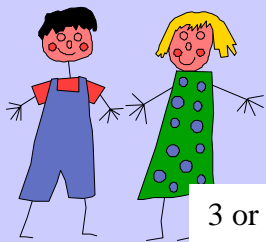
Quantitative Results

Gender of Children in OOHC



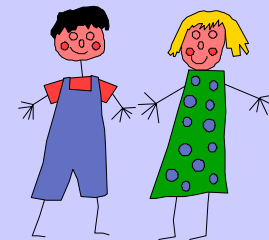
- The sample (n=80) was made up of 51% females (n=41) and 49% males (n=39).
- A crosstab was calculated between the variables sex and recoded variable of number of placements (placer2). Recode was divided into two or fewer placements to reflect the CFSR standard. Results found that 70% (n=56) of the children experienced two or fewer placements since entering OOHC.
- No difference was found in regards to gender and placement stability with both males and females population being equal at 35.0% (n=28).





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Placemen

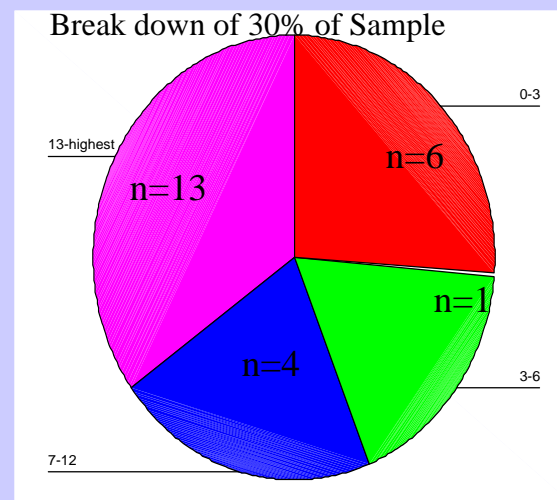
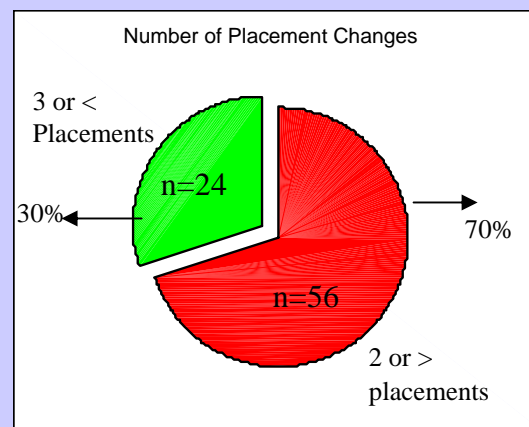
Quantitative Results



Age of children in OOHC in comparison to number of placement

*In regards to the recoded variable, child's date of birth (agecomr), a crosstabs with the variable placement moves (placemen) suggests that the older the child the more placements experienced. Of the 30% (n=13) of children that experienced 3 or more changes in placement 54% (n=13) were age 13 years or older.

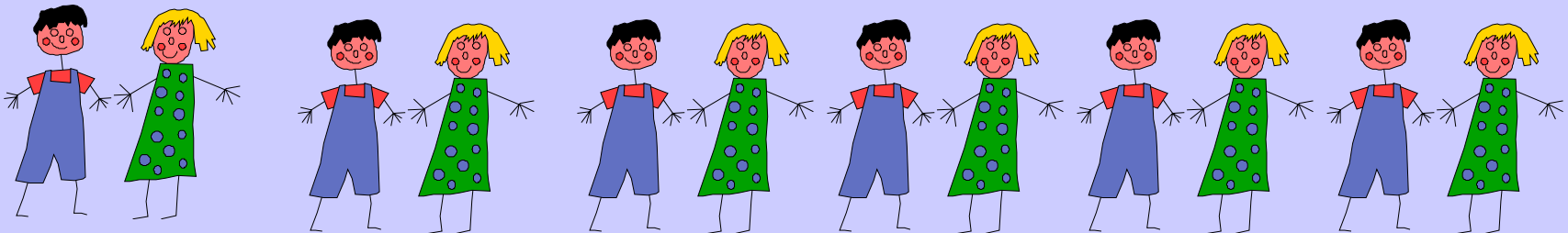
*It is also of interest, of children, newborn to 3 years of age, 25% (n=6) of them have experienced 3 or more changes in placements while in OOHC. The most stable age group was children ages 3-6, as 4.5% (n=1) experienced more than three changes in placement.

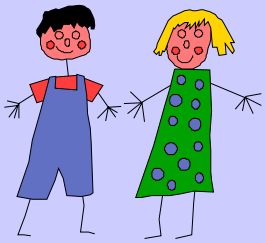


Quantitative Results

A Comparison of Number of Moves with Number of Visits

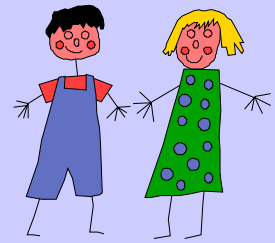
- A Pearson's r was computed to compare the number of placement moves and the number of face to face visits with children in their foster home in the past 18 months. There was strong statistical significance in regards to these variables with a $p < .05$ ($p = .034$).
- Crosstabs was also computed on the recoded variables of the number of social worker visits (swvisitr) and the recoded variable of the number of placement moves (placerm). Data suggests that 100% ($n = 80$) of children who had 0 thru 5 moves during the period under review, were visited by their social worker 21 or more times, which supports our hypothesis that the more visits a child has from its social worker the less moves occurred for the sample.





Quantitative Results

Number of Social Worker Visits with Child



- A Chi-Square Test of Independence command was calculated comparing the frequency of visits to the number of placement moves. It was hypothesized that the number of visits does effect placement stability. The null hypothesis cannot be rejected with this test as there was only slight statistical correlation found, ($p=.074$).
- Crosstabs were also computed on the recoded variables of the number of placement moves (placer2) and the number of social worker visits (swvisitc), which supports the hypothesis that frequent social worker visits increases placement stability.

Chi-Square Tests

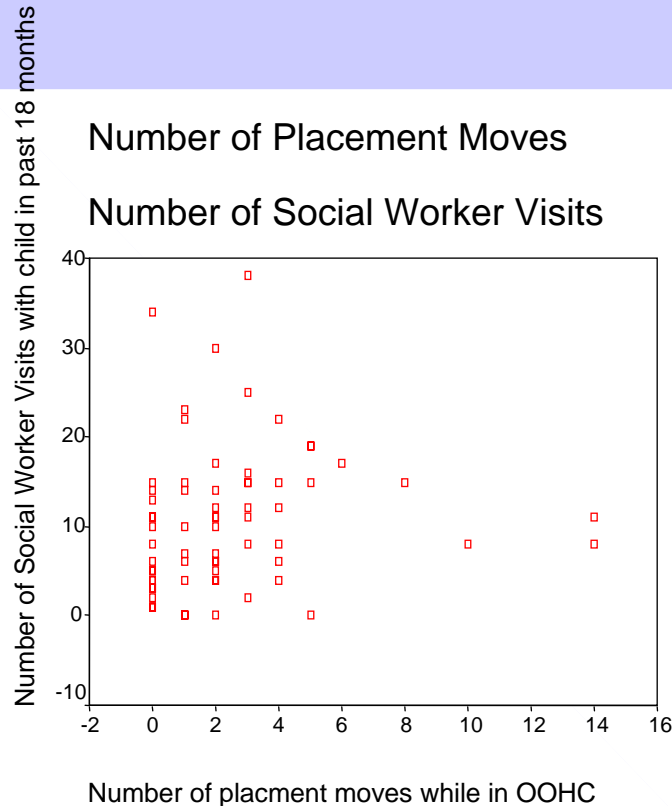
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	237.155 ^a	207	.074
Likelihood Ratio	153.333	207	.998
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.315	1	.069
N of Valid Cases	80		

a. 240 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5.
The minimum expected count is .01.

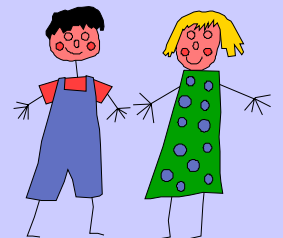


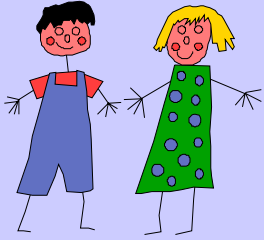
Quantitative Results

Number of Placement Moves Since Initial Entry Into OOHC

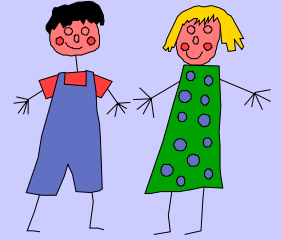


- In regards to these two variables, number of social worker visits to child and number of placement moves, the scatter plot suggest that there is a nonperfect positive correlation with $p > .05$; ($p = .068$).





Quantitative Discussion



FINDINGS

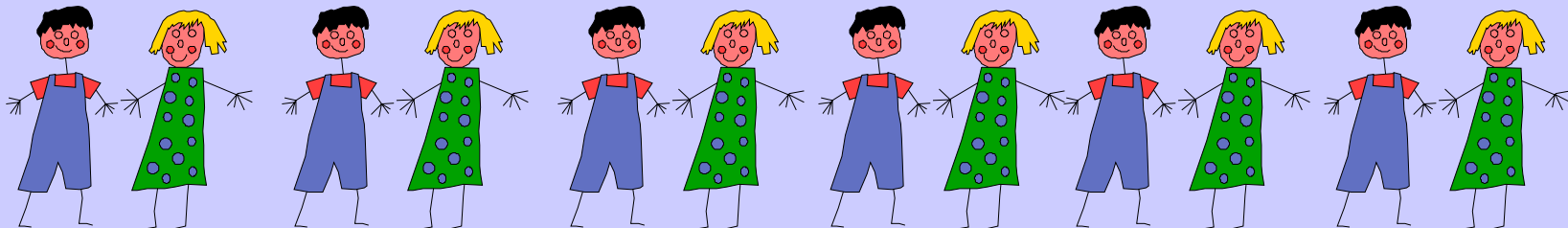
- There is a strong correlation between the average length of time in OOHC and the age ranges of the children in foster care in both state and regional data.
- There was a large number of children who experienced fewer than two moves, which was unexpected.
- The older the child the more placement moves experienced, this was expected.

LIMITATIONS

- Failed to have a standardized definition in regards to permanency.
- Had to recode date of birth of the child to create the new variable of age, which was far more useful data.
- The outliers in regards to the length of time in OOHC reflected a significant number of the sample, 15% (n=12) which had only been in OOHC for a one month period and 12.9% (n=10) had been in OOHC greater than 38 months.

Qualitative Design and Sample

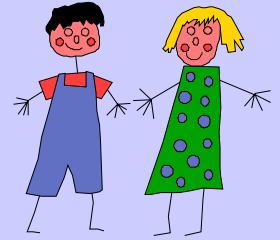
- The purpose of the qualitative research was to evaluate the effects of face to face visits by the social worker to the child and to the foster families as mandated by the CFSR on achieving permanency via placement stability. The narrative approach allowed the researchers to document the actual experiences of visits and interaction between foster families and the social worker assigned and also to make comparisons with existing agency standards of practice.
- The researchers utilized an observational purposive sampling method directly from the TWO-058 to form a sampling frame consisting of 10 social workers and 10 foster parents. Data was obtained from study subjects through interviews utilizing a review tool consisting of six questions. Interviews were conducted with foster parents in their homes and with social workers in their work environment.
- The researchers used three steps in analyzing the data obtained for this study. First, the assembly of raw case data that consist of all the information collected for the case was needed. Secondly, the researchers constructed the data file, organized, classified, and edited case data. Finally, the researchers wrote the case study narrative including information collected from interviews and existing data in regards to the effects of the social worker's face to face visits on achieving and maintaining permanency via placement stability.





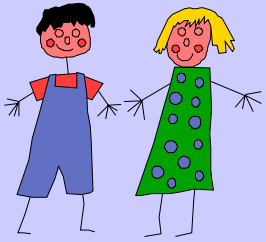
Qualitative Questions

The Effects of Frequent Visits as Supports to Foster Families

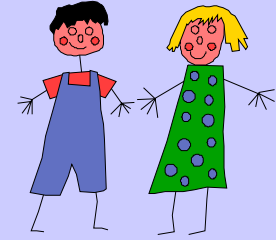


Social workers and foster parents were asked a series of six questions each in regard to face to face foster home visits. They were asked to:

- *Describe the visits between themselves and the children in the foster home?
- *Discuss the frequency and consistency of visits in the foster home?
- *Identify what they feel effects the frequency of social worker visits to the home?
- *In cases where visits were not frequent, did they have an opinion as to why not?
- *Who's responsibility is it to maintain the visits?
- *If social worker visits or lack of visits effected the placement in anyway?



Themes



- Transportation

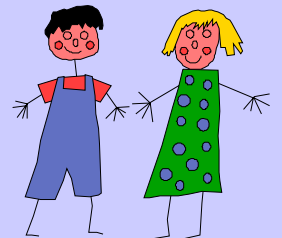
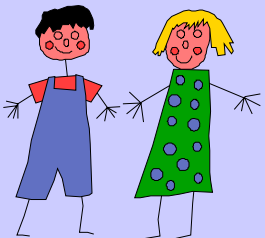
- Time

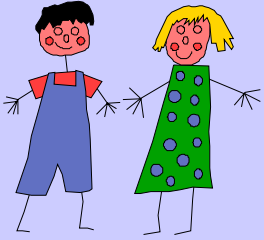
- Distance

- Compromising

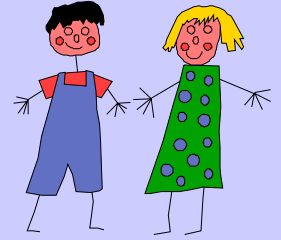
- Case Loads

- Relationship





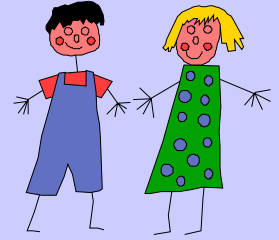
Social Worker Quotes



- “It is mostly the time and distance constraint that is the hardest. It is very hard to visit with children as often as needed or as often as I would like to, if they’re placed in a remote part of the county or a different county all together. I can be to most foster families in crisis in about 30-45 minutes in my county, but out of county I may have to drive two hours one way to get to a family and then most of the time the crisis is over, but I go anyway.”
- “Often times there is compromising because our foster parents are really open with us and that is something we talk with them about when we go out there on our initial visit as to when they are going to be home.”
- “I think a big issue is that where visits are not being kept or made, I do think it centers around the time we have to get our work done.”
- “And the foster parents don’t want to transport because it takes 45 minutes to an hour and a half one way to the office where visits are to occur.”



Foster Parent Quotes

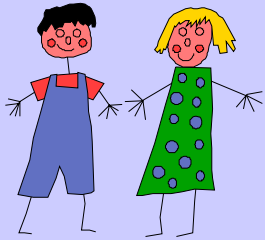


- “I always see someone once a month at least, but I would think from my observation, social workers have too many cases and there is not enough time in a day to address all the current pressing issues and visit all their homes, and do all their reports to the court.”
- “Usually it is compromise because I have three different workers at this time and sometimes I feel like it is too much...I always call them constantly to inform them or to ask a favor of them or assistance from them.”
- “I feel that distance is a big part of social workers coming to my home, especially when I have children from other counties. Most of the time it is at least an hour to my home from most offices. So it is a long drive out and a long drive back.”
- “I just think that there is a high number of children placed in our area and there is just not enough workers to allow more intense multiple visits.”
- “I would say being able to keep kids in my home depends upon my relationship with my workers.
- “I am not going to have a child moved because a worker did not make a visit. For me and my family, it is about the relationship we develop with the child.”

Qualitative Discussion

- The foster families and social workers interviewed reported that time, distance and high caseload were barriers preventing frequent visits to the foster homes. However, foster parents and social workers alike stated that actual social worker visits to the home contributed very little to placement stability. Each group reported that placement stability is based on whether or not the foster family becomes attached and committed to the child. Both groups reported that there has to be compromise on the part of everyone to provide the best services for the children. Several foster parents and social workers reported that most often when a child had to change placements it was because the child had needs that exceeded the capabilities of the foster family and that often after receiving treatment the child was returned to their home.





WRAPPING IT UP!!



- In order for this research to be well rounded the qualitative study was essential to the findings. Using the narrative approach via face to face interviews information was provided showing a tremendous amount of support from foster parents toward social workers and vice versa.
- In regards to policy, there needs to be changes in the definition of permanency and what constitutes a move or change in placement. The category of “other” in regards to data entry should not be used as the reason for a placement move. A more detailed explanation in this category is needed.
- Social worker case assignments should be monitored more closely to align their case load and to align social worker to supervisor ratio's with the Counsel on Accreditation (COA) Standards .
- For future research, chart review should be conducted over the lifetime of the case not a specific time frame. Also, it would be interesting to research the degree and/or type of abuse/neglect involved in each removal and to consider its effect on the number of placement moves and permanency the child experiences.